



EMPOWERING WOMEN VIA EDUCATION AND GENDER BUDGET

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ABSTRACT

It is more important for a true empowerment of women is her equal participation in a mode of production i.e. the economy. This is one area which has not been given required importance at least in India. Women can never be liberated in the absence of a system of Education which gives her an equal opportunity to make her best and realize her ambitions. The common image of 'women as a dependent' on the charity of man and society with kicks and kisses syndrome is the most unfortunate thing to prevail in the country.

KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment, Women Education, Gender Budget.

INTRODUCTION:

Women historically have never been given the required importance as man in the entire world is it in the field of politics or economy not to mention education. History is full with stories of exploitation, humiliation and suppression of women across the world. It will be surprising to know that even England, which is known as the mother of parliaments, has enacted equal voting rights through universal franchise for women only in the first quarter of the 20th century. The subject of women empowerment or women's liberation is so vast that it would take volumes to touch up on each area of concern in this regard. Literacy equal rights, emancipation from bondage, empowerment are some of the areas of focus for women's advancement in society.

Unlike in the West, women in India are euphemistically protected while at the time they are exploited in one form or the other. What women requires is not protection but promotion; an encouragement to participate along with men in various economic activities of society. It is only a woman is educationally equal, she is socially and politically equal to men. To quote Karl Marx the consciousness of an individual is determined by his social existence.

THE LAW IS IN FAVOUR:

The most revolutionary development happened in India is the enactment of the Hindu Succession Act 1956 and the Hindu Marriage Act 1955. These two acts have recognized the status of a woman for the first time in India as equal to that of man. For the first ever time, the provision of divorce was made in law and equally the consent of a woman for a marriage besides qualifying age were made compulsory. The Indian Succession Act of 1925 was equally a progressive legislation recognizing the importance of women in matters of property. Over the years the law in India, has been so improved to provide equal status to women in all fields.

RESERVATIONS ABOUT RESERVATION:

The answer and the reason for the above question is not far to seek. The epithet given by Shakespeare frailty thy name is women" seems to be still relevant in Indian context. The policy makers though make provisions in law for empowerment of women they fail to translate the same into action more often than not. Ever since the first amendment to the Constitution took place in 1951 (article 15(4)). The state was only concerned with special class of citizens known as SC, ST or OBCs. Women were never treated as a special class. It is irony that social and educational backwardness being the reason to treat people as special class women in India in spite of being socially educationally backward, they were never given reservations in jobs in the country except in few states like Chhattisgarh. How can a girl or women, being dependent on either father or husband for her basic survival without a formal qualification or skill to seek employment, be liberated in true sense of this term. This is a million dollar question. Conversely, it is evident in the society that women who are economically independent either by way of an employment or some property to their name or through an independent source of income, have often exhibited great courage even to an extent of separating from their oppressive husbands. In short economic security for women is sine qua non for her empowerment which is only possible through educational empowerment which eventually leads to her liberation. The next important question is whether the govt. followed the policy of gender budgeting - a trend of the 21st century with regard to Education - especially the higher education.

GENDER BUDGETING:

Gender Budgeting is the trend of the day. Across the world the importance of women in development is acknowledged by way of substantial allocations in favour of all round empowerment of women. Gender Budgeting is an ongoing

process which helps to look at General Budgets from a Gender Perspective. It is an exercise to translate stated gender commitments of the Government into budgetary commitments. Gender Budgeting is, in simple terms, allocation of resources exclusively for women oriented programmes or the proportionate share of women development in all programmes.

How serious is India in so far as women's empowerment is concerned is a question never answered satisfactorily. Let us have a look at the priorities of budget in favour of women in the planned development scheme of the country.

The Commonwealth Secretariat GRB (Gender Related Budget) Initiative identified possible indicators that could be used to prepare a GRB statement. These indicators are proposed as starting points for a continuous process of monitoring resource allocations and linking these to government commitments and policies. They include:

- Share of total expenditure targeted to gender equality programmes
- Gender balance in public sector employment which looks at the number of women and men at different levels and in different jobs.
- Share of expenditures devoted to women's priority needs from public services.
- Share of expenditure devoted to national women's machinery and to the gender units within each ministry.
- Share of expenditure devoted to women's priority income transfer which would include child support grants that provide monthly payments to care givers of young children in poor households.
- Gender balance in business support such as subsidies, training or credit provided by the Ministries of trade and Industry and Agriculture.
- Gender balance in public sector contracts including contracts awarded, including contracts to build homes for public works.
- Gender balance in decision making bodies, forums and committees
- Gender balance in government training programmes.

THE DISCOURAGING PICTURE OF WOMEN LITERACY:

The Indian government has taken a potential commitment for education for all; however, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. In 1991, less than 40 per cent of the 330 million women aged 7 and over were literate, which means today there are over 200 million illiterate women in India. While the GER continues to be low for the overall population, there are large variations among the various categories of population based on gender, urban or rural habitation and rich and poor.

Besides the ever increasing gap of gender in urban-rural divide aspect, the enrolment ratio of women has been discouragingly uneven from state to state in the country in the last few decades. As per the 2011 census, Kerala stands out as the state for highest women literacy rate with over 92.07%, Mizoram as second with 89.27% of women literates. The other side of the story happens to be in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh with just 50-60% of women literates. Incidentally these two are the most populous states in the country. It is also observed that the literacy levels in

women have a high co-relation with health indicators of population. For instance, Kerala has the lowest IMR with highest life expectancy whereas; Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have lowest life expectancies. In Rajasthan, Women Literacy Rate has been appalling with just 52.12% of women being literates. States such as Gujarat, Sikkim, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Karnataka, Assam, Haryana, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh etc. have been oscillating in female literacy rates from 50-80%.

EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

It goes without saying that women cannot be liberated without being imparted formal education at least for 5-6 years. The necessity is more in a strictly gender biased society such as India. Unfortunately in India, around, 70% women have only a primary level of education which is surely insufficient to liberate themselves from the clutches of orthodox tradition and empower themselves to stand-up to the challenges of modern society. In the field of higher education, it is observed that the enrolment is extremely limited below 30% of the age group of 18 to 23. Even in this, women account only for one-third of the students in colleges and universities. The imbalance in the sex-ratio in higher education is evident except in faculties such as engineering & commerce and, the faculty of Education as it seems to be the natural choice for women.

Some of the reasons for a disproportionate rate of literacy in women and poor enrolment in higher education could be as under:

- Indian society being mostly male dominated, the very idea of equating a woman with a man is still not so saleable an idea, at least, in rural India and as a result though in principle, female literacy is accepted but somewhere on the way, it is infected by Dropout syndrome
- Poverty and unemployment are strong economic disadvantages which affect people living below poverty line. As a consequence, the parents find it hard to send children especially girls to schools, as it is no less expensive an affair.
- Social factors such as caste, religion, discrimination of sexes takes its own toll in terms of women literacy. Infrastructure facilities are yet to be provided in full-fledged fashion so that parents are encouraged. Lack of buildings, roads, drinking water etc. has a discouraging effect; In Uttar Pradesh 23% of schools did not have water supply while 40% did not have latrines.
- The relatively poor enrolment ratio of girls in higher education seems to be related to cultural factors such as early marriages of girls and suppressive gender value systems.
- Lack of infrastructure such as hostels, exclusive women colleges in adequate number, women teachers and gender friendly transport systems appear to discourage women's participation in higher education.

SPECIAL AUDIT:

Tribal sub-plan for development of scheduled tribes and special component plan for the benefit of scheduled castes has been in implementation for the last few decades and the Accountant General conducts complete audit of the allotment and allocations made under these two schemes to keep a vigil on the purpose of expenditure. Similarly, there is a need for exclusive accountability of the authorities concerned with the execution of gender budgeted schemes and programmes. It is only then that the objective behind the gender budget is fulfilled. The government must see to it that in the sector of higher learning, adequate resources are allocated for women's education and equally it must ensure that the same is expended as per the norms laid down, or else, it would be a futile exercise to earmark funds just in the name of gender budgeting.

The Government of India from the year 2002 has been emphatically insisting upon implementation of gender budgeting in almost all departments of development. The Department of Women and Child Development has been nodal department to monitor the gender budget related aspects in all the departments and look after the needs of women empowerment accordingly. The higher education departments in almost all states today, do not seem to have adhered to the norms of the gender budgeting. It is high time that the government made a serious effort towards streamlining the administrative channels and meant business strictly. A lack-lustre attitude of government towards an important area of gender budgeting in higher education could only mean half-hearted disposition towards women's empowerment, be it economical or educational.

IMPLEMENTING GENDER BUDGET IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

Gender Budgeting in Higher Education will create a sea change in the economic and political fields of women development. The required infrastructure for mobility of women will be created when special allocations are made in Centre and State budgets. Following ways and means can be really productive in implementing and monitoring of Gender Budgeting in Higher Education:

- Accountability of the State implementing Agencies and Authorities is pin pointedly determined in the event of diversion of resources.

- As against prevailing system of general pool of financial grants where anything can be done in the name of HRD a tailor made earmarking of resources will only be utilised for areas of women's Colleges, Universities, Hostels, Labs, and related infrastructure.
- It is also essential that these financial allocations are placed in a high power Committee headed by qualified women with maximum number of Women academicians and bureaucrats as members.
- Periodic review of schemes and their execution can be wake up by the Committee and recommendations can be made in terms of quality and control.
- We need an apex body at national levels to advice the planning Commission of India and the Ministry of HRD. All State Governments can follow suit and come up with their own Bodies towards this objective. (It is worth mentioning here that there are similar agencies and Bodies in matters of Minority or SC and STs. After all the Constitution of India specially lies down in Article 15(3) provisions for the welfare of women and children)
- This call for a legislation or rule making exercise by the Subordinate Legislation, whatever it takes for that matter, to clearly spell out the rules of the game.

CONCLUSION:

It is high time that the State has taken the call and seriously thought about the need for a gender budget in Higher Education field. After all it is higher learning that can only emancipate a woman from the shackles of oppression and exploitation. The plethora of schemes announced from times to time by the Department of Women and Child Development for the development of women and their empowerment will end up in fiasco in the absence of exclusive budget for women education. University Grants Commission must bear the torch and lead the campaign in all sincerity. The community of academicians and intellectuals should rise to the occasion and sensitize the policy makers. Let us not forget that there is good lot of Advisors (intellectuals from NGOs) in the Planning Commission of India who can blow the whistle. Media has also can be a substantial contributor in this mission by highlighting areas of concern. The National Women's Commission cannot afford to remain a silent spectator in the midst of pathetic scenario of woman education in the country. It has the statutory obligation to fight for the cause of women such as the one we are discussing till now.

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